



## The Royal Dutch Marines host special Christmas celebration for island children

Reverend Dick Pranger of the Royal Dutch Marines presided over a special evening on Saturday, December 23, where the children that regularly attend services in the small, charming chapel at the camp in Saveneta were the stars.

Families gathered at sunset to sing popular hymns and to watch a performance of "The Littlest Shepherd," known by many names in many lands, but since this is Aruba, and the play was in Dutch, his name was "Niels."

The play was produced and directed by Menno v/d Straten, whose children, Nanouk and Ewoud played Mary and Joseph. The story tells of the youngest of the shepherds, derided by the others for his size, who travels with gifts to see the newborn baby Jesus. Along the way give them to needy people he meets en route so that by the time he arrives at the manger, he is empty handed. According to the director, the point of the play is he need not have brought anything, as the birth of the baby Jesus is the gift to the world. There is also a point that could be taken from the play, that people need not give to Jesus, but rather to those that are truly in need, as that is what Jesus would prefer.

Effie v/d Staten, the mother of Menno also entertained the children and the gathering with the story of The Nativity, and children of all ages made various presentations. Every year, on Christmas Eve, the camp pastor conducts a general mass for the marines in the field of the camp, to which any islanders wishing to attend are welcome. This holiday tradition, which began many years ago, started out with only a few local residents, but grew in popularity to include 1400 Arubans and Dutch Marines worshipping together. Choir groups perform, and it is a festive event. Because of the size of the gathering, a smaller, special evening is held just for the children with the members of the church, though other families are welcome to attend as well. The soft lights and coziness of the chapel lends an atmosphere that is quite mystical, and the children performed beautifully, with a sense of awe for the holiday.